United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General is back in New York following trip to East Asia; on final day in China, he met with Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen; Minister says Secretary-General's visit to Korean peninsula played positive role.

+ Department of Public Information announces publication of 46th volume of Yearbook of the United Nations, covering activities of United Nations system in 1992.

+ Framework Convention on Conservation of Biological Diversity becomes international law today, less than 18 months after signing at Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro; treaty commits nations to protect plant and animal diversity and to use -- and share -- organic resources sustainably.

+ Despite isolated attacks, United Nations personnel report relative calm in Sarajevo and other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina; in United Nations Protected Areas in Croatia, Christmas Truce is being observed by both sides.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali is back in New York following his ten-day visit to East Asia. On Monday, the last day of his visit to China, he met for an hour and a half with Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen. The Secretary-General reviewed for the Minister his recent discussions in the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (ROK). Among the areas covered were the various attitudes towards current negotiations between the DPRK and the United States, the DPRK and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAIEA), and between the two States themselves. The Secretary-General had stressed the importance of continuing all of these negotiating tracks.

The Minister stated that the Secretary-General's visit to the area had played a positive and useful role and said he agreed fully that it was essential that the negotiations continue. They talked about Cambodia, and the Secretary-General thanked the Minister for China's support for the United

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Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), as well as for the military observers China had provided for other peace-keeping operations. They also discussed the proposals for reforming the United Nations, including the composition of the Security Council.

The Secretary-General reviewed with the Minister the upcoming International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the World Conference on Women, which China is to host in 1995.

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The Department of Public Information announced the publication yesterday of the 46th volume of the Yearbook of the United Nations, covering the activities of the United Nations system in 1992. This is the current edition, published within 12 months following the calendar year covered.

The Yearbook is the single most comprehensive and authoritative publication covering the work of the Organization. It is designed not just for use by diplomats, government officials and scholars, but also by writers, journalists, teachers and students who seek readily available current information about the United Nations. Its 56 chapters cover political and security questions, regional questions, economic and social questions, trusteeship and decolonization, legal questions, administrative and budgetary questions and intergovernmental organizations related to the United Nations.

The 1,277-page volume records the important milestones in international relations, including the first-ever summit meeting, in January 1992, of the Security Council at the level of Heads of State and Government, and the conclusion by the Conference on Disarmament, after two decades of negotiations, of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. It also provides detailed accounts of the expanding and crucial role played by the United Nations in the efforts to help settle regional conflicts, for instance those in the Middle East, the former Yugoslavia and South Africa.

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The Framework Convention on the Conservation of Biological Diversity becomes international law today, less than 18 months after its signing at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. In the face of rapid extinction of species as a result of human activities, the treaty commits nations to protect biological diversity -- ecosystems and genetic resources, as well as species. It pledges parties to use sustainably the world's plants, animals and all other organisms, and seeks to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits that result from the use of genetic resources, particularly for developing countries.

The importance of biodiversity is evident in all facets of our lives: More than a quarter of all prescriptions in modern Western medicine contain active ingredients extracted from wild plants, and in countries like Canada

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every variety of wheat contains genes introduced from as many as 14 other countries. The planet's food supply depends on diversity -- the genetic uniformity of some crops has allowed pests to sweep across countries, causing crippling damage and, at times, enormous loss of life.

The ratification that brought the Convention into force was Mongolia's, on 30 September. Today -- 90 days later -- the treaty becomes a binding legal document for the countries that have ratified it -- 37 to date. By mid-December, 167 States had signed the Convention and many of those are now in the process of securing ratification, including the United States and countries of the European Union. The first meeting of Governments that have ratified the Convention (the first Conference of Parties) is tentatively scheduled for 28 November to 9 December next year. Under the treaty, countries promise to develop national plans for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and also to enact laws to protect threatened species and habitats and expand natural protected areas.

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Despite ongoing gunfire in parts of Sarajevo today, United Nations personnel in the beseiged city reported that the situation there was less tense than usual. They attributed that to the successful evacuation this week of a number of civilians. Aside from isolated attacks, it was quiet also in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the United Nations Protected Areas (UNPAs) in Croatia, where a Christmas Truce was being honoured by both sides.

However, attacks on United Nations personnel, installations and equipment continued. Two United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) Military Police vehicles were caught in heavy machine-gun fire yesterday afternoon at a Bosnian Army checkpoint on the road between Visoko and Kiseljak. The Bosnian Army and Bosnian Croat forces were trading fire in the vicinity at the time. Two Canadian Battalion vehicles dispatched to the area were able to evacuate the Military Police officers and there were no United Nations casualties. On Christmas Eve, as the so-called Christmas Truce was beginning, a French Battalion soldier was wounded when mortar rounds impacted near his light tank. Yesterday, United Nations military observers in Kakanj had the windscreen of their vehicle smashed when a child threw a rock at them.

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